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EDITORIALS

A NEW METHOD OF MEDICAL LICENSURE —THE BASIC SCIENCE LAWS OF WISCONSIN, CONNECTICUT, WASHINGTON, AND MINNESOTA

In 1920, Doctor O. B. Bock of Sheyboan, Wisconsin, started an agitation in his state in favor of a new method of medical licensure. In 1921, he was instrumental in having a bill covering the essentials of the present Wisconsin basic science law for practitioners of the healing art, introduced into the Wisconsin legislature. It did not go to passage that year; and in 1923 it again met with defeat. But in 1925 the measure became a law, with only four dissenting votes in the legislature! The act went into effect on June 12, 1925.

Wisconsin's interest in such a measure arose largely from the activity of chiropractors, who in 1915 secured a law in Wisconsin, whereby they could practice unmolested, provided they did not hold themselves out before the public as licensed or registered physicians; about two hundred having entered the state every year to take up their practice.

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Seventeen days after Wisconsin secured its law the state of Connecticut placed a similar act on its statute books. Wisconsin and Connecticut acted independently and without conference in securing their respective laws, and were led to their action because of quite different causes. In Connecticut a "diploma mill" scandal had arisen in connection with one of the cultist boards, and after the exposé the state had risen in its wrath,

had instituted a house cleaning and the Connecticut basic science law was the result. As a result of the investigation, in which the state medical society, the governor, a grand jury and lay citizens all lent their aid, a total of 168 licenses were revoked, about three-fourths of this number being held by persons who were practicing in other states.

In the bill it was stated that "The examination shall be so conducted as not to discriminate against the particular views of any bona fide organization, sect or school, as to any remedies or treatment or any system of therapeutics."

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What is the essence of a basic science law, and why did its acceptance seem a rational method of procedure for the states which have adopted it since the first of such laws was passed in 1925?

A basic science law is founded on the proposition that a patient who consults a practitioner of the healing art may be suffering from a disease in which serious danger to health and life may be involved. The citizen who is such a patient has a right to expect that the state will protect him from incompetent advice; or at least that the state will safeguard his health and life interests by insisting that all practitioners of the healing art, no matter to what so-called school of healing belonging, should have those certain minimum qualifications in preliminary education and in professional training, that would make each such practitioner possess that fair amount of technical knowledge which should be expected and demanded of any man holding himself before the public as competent to treat injury or disease by this, that, or the other methods.

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The fundamental or primary subjects having to do with the practice of the healing art are construed in most of these basic science laws, to include: anatomy, physiology, chemistry, bacteriology, pathology, diagnosis, and hygiene.

These are the subjects that are usually called the basic sciences. It is worthy of note that not one of these subjects has to do with methods of healing, but each is construed to be very proper knowledge which every practitioner who wishes to claim ability to treat injury or disease by any method whatsoever, should possess.

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In these basic science acts there is no definition of the "practice of medicine" but there is a definition of the "practice of the healing art," somewhat as follows: "For the purposes of this act, any license authorizing the licentiate to offer or undertake to diagnose, treat, operate on or prescribe for any human pain, injury, disease, deformity or physical or mental condition is a license to practice the healing art."

This definition is purposely made almost all-inclusive, but the various bills exempt by special sections, such groups as dentists, midwives, nurses, optometrists, and religious healers.

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It is usually stipulated that the boards of examiners shall consist of three to five members, usually laymen, sometimes professors or teachers